

Volunteers in the Courts News

Winter 2005

Judges mentor law students

Judge Margaret J. Vergeront, Court of Appeals District IV, has been a lawyer for 30 years and a judge for 11. But to second-year law student Kara Von Blasingame, she is simply “someone I can ask without feeling stupid.”

Vergeront is one of two Madison judges who are mentoring law students this year as part of a project to improve the experience of Legal Education Opportunities (LEO) students at the UW Law School (the other is Judge James L. Martin, Dane County Circuit Court, who is matched with student Nina McIntyre). The LEO mentoring program targets students of color and students from disadvantaged backgrounds who do not have lawyers in their immediate families, connecting them to the legal community and giving them professionals to whom they can turn for guidance.



Judge Margaret J. Vergeront

For Von Blasingame, a graduate of Macalester College in St. Paul, the mentoring program has allowed her to build a relationship with a judge who takes her to bar functions, sits down with her for coffee or lunch every other week, and even invites her to her home for dinner. They discuss schoolwork and career-related issues – and their favorite haunts in New York City, where Von Blasingame lived and where she hopes to practice law.

“Because Judge Vergeront’s husband is from New York,” Von Blasingame said, “I have someone who can really understand my culture shock.”

The pilot program, which began three years ago, has had 10 or more students and mentors each year. Each of the minority student associations selects two first-year LEO students. The Dean’s Office selects additional students from among all students. Past mentors include some of the most highly regarded judges in the state: Federal Judge Barbara B. Crabb; state Court of Appeals Judges William F. Eich and Paul G. Lundsten; and Dane County Circuit Court Judges Angela B. Bartell, Sarah B. O’Brien, and Maryann Sumi.

To volunteer as a mentor, contact Carolyn Lazar-Butler at the UW Law School, (608) 263-7413 or clbutler2@facstaff.wisc.edu